

Locally-founded band coming back home for anniversary show

By Kayla Cornett

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This year, the Pickin' on the Plains bluegrass festival will be featuring a relatively new band called Driven, with some local band members familiar to the festival.

Colby natives Brandon and Blake McLemore used to play in their family band The McLemores before founding this band, and they still do from time to time.

"We do when we can; it's not very often," Brandon McLemore said. "Usually our only gigs that we maybe do is the Pickin' on the Plains festival and maybe one other one throughout the summer, so we only get to do about two shows a year just because we're so spread out."

Now they focus on Driven. Brandon plays mandolin and Blake plays bass. The other band members are Jake Workman of Salt Lake City, guitar; Rebekah Workman, also of Salt Lake City, fiddle; and Jimmy Campbell of Wichita, banjo and dobro. All of the band members sing.

This festival marks the two-year anniversary for the band, which debuted at Pickin' on the Plains in 2009. The McLemore brothers had started putting the group together in the fall of 2007.

"Blake and I were actually walking through a campground at the Water Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas," Brandon said. "It was about 3 in the morning and the camp was completely dead, but there was this young guitar player just sitting there, with his feet crossed over, next to the campfire. He was playing unbelievable guitar stuff just by himself."

"So Blake and I went down and asked him if he wanted to do some jamming and he said he would. He came up to our camp and we jammed for about two or three hours."

Brandon said they were lucky they had met him that night.

"He was actually going to not come back to the festival again because he was told how good the jamming was there and he didn't have a very good experience with it," Brandon said. "So we had a last-second jam session with him and it was enough for us to convince him to come back to Winfield, and he started camping with us the year after that and things just sort of fell into place."

Brandon also said the experience he's had with the band so far has been good since he

has such talented bandmates.

"It's been pretty unbelievable because our banjo player won some big instrumental championships when he was young," Brandon said. "He won some serious championships when he was like 15 and 16 years old. And then our guitar player won the Texas State Guitar Championship and he won the Texas State Banjo Championship in 2009. And then last year, the guitar player was the runner up for the 2011 National Banjo Championship. He is a monster, he actually majored in jazz guitar at the University of Utah."

Driven now does several gigs a year, mainly during the summer since the band members live in different cities or states.

"We used to only do a couple a year and now, we'll do five this year," Brandon said. "We're planning on doing more, but we just got a new CD out that we think's really gonna take it to the next level."

The self-titled album came out in June and Brandon said it has real potential.

"This new CD that we just cut has got some really serious potential," he said. "Our banjo guy grew up with a gal named Rhonda Vincent, and she's really big in bluegrass so he's got some connections with some people that he's got to get the CD to. And we've got some friends that are on Sirius-XM, the bluegrass station on there, that are gonna get the CD put on there."

Driven also has some music tracks posted on online for people to check out; on PickinOnThePlains.com under the "Bands" section, there is a song from the band's new album, and on the band's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/pages/Driven.

Brandon said his band is a good stepping stone for people not familiar with bluegrass to get started.

"I think our group is one that can really appeal to the younger kids or people that maybe wouldn't think that they would like bluegrass," he said. "I think they'd be really surprised to hear some of the stuff that we do."

He also said people need to see them in person to get the full experience of Driven.

"To get the full effect of how good the guitar player is, people have to see his fingers moving, and I think skeptics would really be shocked if they saw how good this guy is," Brandon said. "Blake and I really consider ourselves very lucky to get to play with him, I'll tell you that much."



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

Colby natives Brandon and Blake McLemore, seen here jamming at a past Pickin' on the Plains festival, founded the band, Driven with the help of Jake and Rebekah Workman and Jimmey Campbell.

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